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TAGS: PREL PGOV UNSC AG MO WI

SUBJECT: GOA REJECTS SYG'S REPORT ON WESTERN SAHARA,
REQUESTS "NEUTRAL" RESOLUTION

REF: A. USUN 767
1B. USUN 794
1C. RABAT 729
1D. RABAT 734
1E. ALGIERS 623

Classified By: Ambassador Richard W. Erdman, Reason 1.4 (b) (d)

SUMMARY AND COMMENT/RECOMMENDATION

11. (C) MFA Counselor and former UN Ambassador Abdallah Baali convoked Ambassador April 25 to explain Algeria's rejection of the recommendations in the UNSYG's report on the Western Sahara, which Baali claimed "ignored the achievements of the past" by abandoning the Baker Plan and the principle of self-determination. Algeria, he stated, will not be a party to direct negotiations between Morocco and the Polisario based on a Moroccan autonomy proposal, since Morocco would not offer genuine autonomy and the approach did not include an element of self-determination. Ambassador noted he had no instructions on the SYG report, but reiterated U.S. support for a mutually acceptable political solution within a UN framework, for direct talks between Morocco and the Polisario, and for the development of an expansive autonomy proposal by Morocco. Ambassador stressed the need for creative thinking about how to proceed given the fact that Morocco would always reject independence while the Polisario would always reject integration. Autonomy therefore offered the only possibility of common ground. Direct Polisario-Morocco negotiations without preconditions could create space to find common ground. Otherwise we risked condemning the refugees to another thirty years in the camps.

Baali argued that time did not favor Morocco, and that pressure from Sahrawi street demonstrations inside Western Sahara could over time force Morocco to return to the idea of a referendum. Baali asked that the U.S. support a "neutral" UNSC resolution on MINURSO renewal that at most "took note of" but did not "welcome" the SYG's report.

12. (C) Given the sharpness of both Algeria and the Polisario's reaction to the SYG's report, we recommend careful consideration be given to the idea of a neutral resolution and technical rollover. Looking ahead, though, we should continue to promote direct Moroccan-Polisario talks without preconditions, with Algeria and Mauritania participating as "interested neighbors," while looking for creative ways to integrate an exercise in self-determination

into the autonomy framework. We should also seek to lay the groundwork for a more private dialogue on creative ways to reconcile autonomy with self-determination. We do not believe, as Embassy Rabat has suggested, that double-teaming with France at this juncture would be productive.

French-Algerian relations are at a particularly raw point because of heated rhetoric over France's colonial rule and, even in the best of times, Polisario and Algeria see France as one-sidedly in favor of Morocco. Accordingly, a U.S.-hosted framework as proposed by Ambassador Bolton strikes us as a more productive way to proceed, or at least to keep the pressure on for new thinking. Unlike Lebanon, associating ourselves with France on this issue will not, in our view, help advance our goals. End summary and comment.

GOA REACTS NEGATIVELY TO UNSYG'S REPORT

¶3. (C) MFA Counselor (and former UN Ambassador) Abdallah Baali convoked Ambassador to MFA April 25. DCM accompanied Ambassador. Baali explained the GOA had received an advance text of Annan's report. Bouteflika had written a letter to Annan requesting that Algeria's position be explained in the report, but that did not occur, perhaps, Baali speculated, because Bouteflika's letter would have undermined the report's recommendation that there be negotiations to include Algeria. Algeria will not be a party to negotiations on Morocco's autonomy proposal, Baali stressed. In response to Ambassador's comment that Algeria is certainly a concerned neighbor if not a party, Baali agreed Algeria should have a say as a neighboring state but would not play a role as a party to the dispute. The negotiations must be between Morocco and the Polisario. Pressed by Ambassador, Baali acknowledged that Algeria and Mauritania had been involved in the negotiations leading to the Houston Accords. Baali, who participated in the Algerian delegation to Houston, said their role had been limited to discussions of the cantonment of military forces and the return of refugees.

BAKER STILL THE OPTIMAL SOLUTION

¶4. (C) Baali asserted that the Baker Plan was still on the table. It provided for all options: autonomy, independence, and integration. Algeria saw no need for a new plan. If there were to be Moroccan-Polisario negotiations, they should be aimed at the implementation of Baker. Ambassador asked if it was correct that Algeria would not support negotiations without preconditions? Baali said yes, Algeria supported Baker, while recognizing there would be a need for negotiations on the implementation of Baker. Foreign Minister Bedjaoui was in New York April 24 to "make clear to Annan that forgetting the achievements already made was not the right approach." The concept of negotiations without preconditions was unacceptable to Algeria.

¶5. (C) Reviewing the negotiations leading to the Houston accords, Baali said the Algerian and Mauritanian delegations had been present, but in separate rooms from the Moroccan and Polisario negotiators. Algeria and Mauritania had only been directly involved in discussions on cantonment of Polisario forces on their territory and the return of refugees, while the parties also discussed the voter list and referendum electoral campaign. Baker had, however, provided regular briefings to the Algerian delegation, and the Algerian delegation remained in close touch with the Polisario delegation throughout. Ambassador asked why this could not be the format for negotiations now, with Algeria maintaining its position of not being a party but rather a concerned neighbor? Baali replied that Houston was meant to find a way to implement the UN settlement plan. Now, however, Annan was calling for negotiations without preconditions, a totally different format and "logic." Algeria did not see the need to start over from scratch, especially since autonomy was one of the options included in Baker. All the elements were present in Baker, the problem was that Morocco had lost confidence that it could win a referendum after five years of autonomy, even if the Moroccan settlers voted.

AMBASSADOR STRESSES NEED TO FIND COMMON GROUND

¶ 16. (C) Ambassador said that while he did not have instructions on the SYG's report per se, the U.S. view was that we sought a political solution in the UN framework. There should be a direct dialogue between Morocco and Polisario to create a political space in which a compromise could be achieved. A solution must be mutually acceptable, since neither the U.S. nor the international community would impose a settlement. Since Morocco rejects independence and the Polisario rejects integration, it made sense to focus on autonomy as the only possible area of common ground. We did not want to condemn the Sahrawi refugees to another 30 years in the camps. We had therefore urged Morocco to come up with a meaningful autonomy proposal with real self-government. Ambassador noted that while he understood that Algeria was unhappy with Annan's report, it did call for self-determination to be part of the settlement.

¶ 17. (C) Baali said the problem with Morocco's approach to autonomy was that it actually led back to the integration track. It should be up to the Sahrawis to decide what they wanted, as had been the case with all other cases of decolonization. Noting he was speaking personally, Ambassador commented there was a need to find a way to implement the principle of self-determination creatively in a way that would be acceptable to both parties. It was clear we were at an impasse; there was a need for creative thinking that could reconcile the legitimate concerns of both sides. Algerians had voted in a referendum on independence in which there was only one option. Since Algeria as well as we knew that autonomy was the only possible basis for finding common ground, why couldn't a similar approach be explored that would bring a solution within a self-determination framework?

Ambassador added that the idea of mutually agreeing to extend the 5-year autonomy period (until everyone was certain a referendum would produce the desired result) -- an idea that MFA SYG Lamamra and Baali himself had mentioned to him in recent conversations -- was the type of creative idea that should be privately explored. Baali responded that it should be up to the Sahrawis to choose. Algeria's independence referendum was not a good parallel because all the elements of independence had already been worked out with France, he argued. The bottom line was that Algeria could not accept the SYG's proposed format.

TIME FACTOR NOT IN MOROCCO'S FAVOR

¶ 18. (C) Baali said there was also a time factor. Algeria saw no need to rush into negotiations that would leave it up to the parties to find a solution without reference to past agreements. Ambassador pointed out that the parties would not be on their own, the international community would help them. Baali responded that there was a new situation on the ground in the Western Sahara with the demonstrations held since last fall. For many years the population of the Western Sahara had been quiet, so both Morocco and Algeria had been surprised by the new level of Sahrawi national identity. This was creating a new situation in which changes on the ground could speed up the process of holding a referendum as Morocco and the international community felt the impact of the new Sahrawi nationalism. Ambassador commented that it appeared that Algeria's objection was not to autonomy per se, but to a referendum with autonomy as the only option. Baali said there was a need for a referendum that offered options to the Sahrawis, not a plan imposed by Morocco.

SEEKING A "NEUTRAL" RESOLUTION

¶ 19. (C) Baali said Algeria urged the U.S. not to support a MINURSO extension resolution that referred positively to the SYG's negotiations recommendation. Instead, Algeria wanted a simple, technical resolution that at most would take note of

the SYG's report without endorsing it. Then we could see how to proceed. Baali said he was sorry he could not be more positive. The Algerian Ambassador to the UN had sent a letter to Annan expressing Algeria's reservations. The language in this letter had been carefully drafted. Noting that he now had to demarche the French Ambassador, Baali remarked that at the time of UNSCR 1495, the U.S. had wanted the text as strongly worded as possible, while France had managed to water it down. The French role was a key reason why there was a stalemate.

ERDMAN